"Love and Togetherness"
A Homily by the Rev. Dr. Stephanie May
First Parish in Wayland
March 25, 2018

In a few moments, we will hear selections of love songs composed by Brahms. The text is based on the poetry of German philosopher and poet, Georg Friedrich Daumer. And Daumer's poetry is deeply indebted to (perhaps even appropriated from) the great Persian poet Hafiz. Our local great poet, Ralph Waldo Emerson, described Hafiz as "a poet for poets." And the great German poet, Goethe, stated, "Hafiz has no peer."

In a BBC article, Hafiz scholar, Daniel Ladinsky attempts to convey a sense of Hafiz in this story:

> *A rather serious – maybe too serious – university student from another country came to Hafiz to personally ask for his permission to translate some of Hafiz's poems into a little book.*
>
> *And he said to Hafiz, "What is the essential quality in your poems that I need to incorporate in my translations to make them abiding and authentic?"*
>
> *And Hafiz smiled, and placed his arms on the man's shoulders, then said, "Do you really want to know?"*
>
> *And the young man said, "Of course."*
>
> *"Well, well then," Hafiz began and continued, "My poems lift the corners of the mouth – the soul's mouth, the heart's mouth. And can effect any opening that can make love."*

In other words, Hafiz embraced not only love, but a sensual approach to love and life. An approach that appealed to the German poet Daumer.

In fact, for many years, Daumer rejected orthodox Christianity as too sterile, too ascetic. Rather, he read Hafiz, drawing from Hafiz's sensual poems of love and life to write his own poetry. Perhaps some of us here feel an echo of Daumer's view of a disconnect between

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Christianity and a sensual love. Perhaps some of us are wondering why we're in a *religious* space to hear these classic works of romantic love?

Yet, we are a religious tradition that embraces life in this world—in a world of human affections and delights, challenges and heartbreaks. We are a tradition that finds the sacred and the holy not only in the universal and transcendent, but also in the imminent, the earthly, the here and now.

Within our human experience, love ranks high as a value. Of course, love comes in many forms—parent/child, siblings, and friends as well as romantic love or committed partners. Love is a critical connection that can give us a sense of belonging and worth. Yet, by calling us into relationships of care and intimacy, love also invites us into spaces of greater vulnerability—a theme the Youth service so ably engaged last Sunday.

Today's musical selections explore *both* the soaring joy and sensual delight of love between partners *and* some of the challenges and heartbreak of navigating relationships of love. Such experiences are familiar to many of us. They contribute—often significantly—to the shape of our lives. Experiences of love contribute to what makes life meaningful and good. And, experiences of love can teach us about conflict, about vulnerability, about loss.

As we listen to these pieces, may we find in them an opportunity to consider our own experiences of love. To reflect on what we have learned about what it means to be together with another. After all, these experiences are part of the sacred story of our lives.

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